



## Policy on External Examiners



## 1. Introduction

- a. External Examiners play a vital role in the maintenance of academic standards and in ensuring rigorous but fair assessment of candidates. This document provides information on the role of External Examiners and outlines the activities in which External Examiners are likely to be involved.
- b. The policy applies to all candidates registered with CLT International to take an assessment for a STEP qualification.

## 2. The role of External Examiners

- a. The role of an External Examiner is to act as a critical friend, not a marker.
- b. The principal responsibilities of External Examiners are to ensure that:
  - assessment procedures have been fairly and properly implemented and that decisions have been made after appropriate and due deliberation
  - standards of candidate performance are comparable with those required by the awarding body (STEP) and are in line with the learning outcomes of the programme
- c. External Examiners also have a role in highlighting and encouraging good practice and advising the Assessment Board on dealing with difficult cases.
- d. The formal responsibility of all External Examiners is to the Director of Profession at STEP and the Managing Director of CLT International.

## 3. Appointment of External Examiners

- a. External examiners must have the qualifications and experience that will enable them to fulfil the primary responsibilities set out in section 2b and the core duties in section 10. Relevant evidence is expected to be provided in support of this.
- b. In addition, an External Examiner must provide evidence that they have:
  - appropriate academic qualifications and experience in the subject area of the programme(s) and/or
  - appropriate professional qualifications and experience in the field covered by the programme(s) of study
  - appropriate standing, credibility and breadth of experience within the academic/professional community for their opinion to carry weight
  - comparable, current experience of examining or assessing in the field of study
  - knowledge and understanding of UK higher education benchmarks for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of academic standards;
  - fluency in English.
- c. External examiners must be able to commit the time to carry out their duties.
- d. External examiners may reside inside or outside the UK as is deemed relevant or appropriate for the programmes to which they are appointed.

#### 4. Period of engagement

- a. The period of engagement for External Examiners is normally three years, from 1 January in the year of appointment, to 31 December in the year that the appointment expires.
- b. The term of an External Examiner's appointment can be extended by a further year, by mutual agreement of the External Examiner and CLT International/STEP.
- c. External Examiners who wish to resign before the end of their period of engagement should write to CLT International/STEP giving six months' notice to allow the appointment of a replacement.
- d. In exceptional circumstances, CLT International/STEP may recommend the termination of an External Examiner's appointment before the end of their period of engagement. Examples of such circumstances are outlined in the External Examiner Handbook.

Before a recommendation for the termination of an External Examiner's engagement is brought forward, strenuous attempts should be made by CLT International to work with the External Examiner to identify and address the underlying issues. Should this fail, the Programmes Manager shall write to the External Examiner and request that they resign. This request should be accompanied by a full account of the issues encountered and their impact on the student experience.

Should no response be received to the resignation request, or if the External Examiner does not agree to resign from their post, the Programmes Manager should make a formal request to the Director of Profession at STEP and the Managing Director of CLT International to recommend that the engagement be terminated. If agreement is given by both parties, the Director of Profession at STEP and the Managing Director of CLT International will write formally to the External Examiner to terminate their engagement.

#### 5. Briefing and induction

- a. When the appointment of an External Examiner is confirmed by the Director of Profession at STEP and the Managing Director of CLT International, the Programmes Manager will write formally to the External Examiner to set out the contractual arrangements.

In addition, CLT International will provide the External Examiner with the External Examiner Handbook containing

- the core duties (see section 10 below) and accountabilities of External Examiners
  - the policies and procedures relating to external examining (as detailed in this policy)
  - any relevant forms.
- b. The External Examiner will also be sent information on the following:
    - the programme(s) for which they are responsible, including the syllabus, course materials, assessment criteria and any programme-specific policies and procedures relating to assessment

- the relevant academic policies and procedures used by the Assessment Board(s)
  - the calendar of events over the coming year, including dates for submission of draft work to External Examiners and for its return, and dates of Assessment Board meetings.
  - details of the person who will be the External Examiner's primary contact.
- c. In addition to the above, the External Examiner should also be provided with the opportunity to meet with students as part of their familiarisation with the programme.
  - d. Where appropriate, the External Examiners will receive copies of the External Examiner reports from the preceding year.
  - e. External Examiners should be given the opportunity to discuss any additional support they require and to be guided through the assessment criteria.
  - f. An external examiner may be appointed to more than one programme where the syllabus is the same or similar.

### **6. The role of External Examiners at an Assessment Board**

- a. External Examiners are expected to be present (either in person or virtually) at the meeting of the Board where the candidate results for the programme(s) for which they are responsible are awarded. External Examiners are full voting members of the Board.
- b. External Examiners will advise the Assessment Board on the general standard of candidate performance in relation to the assessment(s) under their remit. They should be made aware of the outcome of any previous meeting to consider mitigating circumstances. They should be satisfied that decisions are appropriate and consistent, and that the management of the assessment and the decision-making process is appropriate and consistent.
- c. Once the detailed discussion of results has been completed, the Chair of the Assessment Board should invite the External Examiner to comment generally on the assessment process. This oral report must be recorded in the minutes of the Assessment Board.
- d. On rare occasions, an External Examiner may not be prepared to endorse the outcome of the assessment process or the decision of an Assessment Board. On such an occasion, every attempt should be made to resolve the conflict through discussion and negotiation. If such attempts are not successful then the Director of Profession at STEP will review the circumstances and attempt to broker an agreement between the Chair of the Assessment Board and the External Examiner. Failing agreement, the Director of Profession shall have powers to determine the matter and approve the results.
- e. External Examiners must observe the confidentiality of all Assessment Board proceedings and assessment processes.

## **7. The role of External Examiners in dealing with mitigating circumstances**

Under the Policy on Mitigating Circumstances, Mitigating Circumstances Panels consider requests for mitigation submitted by candidates and determine whether the circumstances could have had an effect on the candidate's performance and, if so, how significant the effect is likely to have been. Mitigating Circumstances Panels operate under delegated powers from Assessment Boards and External Examiners, as members of Assessment Boards, may be asked to sit on the Mitigating Circumstances Panel and/or consider recommendations from Mitigating Circumstances Panels.

## **8. External Examiner reports**

- a. External Examiners are expected to make an oral report to the Assessment Board. This report should include the External Examiner's opinion on:
  - the assessment process, including its fairness, accuracy and efficiency
  - the academic quality of the cohort(s) assessed
  - the effectiveness of the teaching (as judged by the performance of the candidates)
  - any improvements that could be made to the teaching or the assessment process
  - any good practice that has been observed
  - whether any recommendations made in previous years have been addressed.
- b. External Examiners are also required to submit a written report for each sitting using the pro-forma report form contained in the External Examiner Handbook. Names of all candidates and staff should be omitted from External Examiners' reports to maintain confidentiality. External Examiners do not need to repeat anything in their report that they believe is adequately covered in the minutes of the Assessment Board although they may, of course, amplify or modify their comments if they choose.
- c. External Examiner reports should be returned to CLT International in accordance with the agreed date. The External Examiner should inform CLT International if they have any problem in meeting this date.
- d. CLT International shall acknowledge receipt of each External Examiner report.
- e. External Examiner reports will be considered by the Programme Delivery Manager, Team Manager and Senior Manager (s) and an action plan will be prepared to address each issue. Where no action is proposed, a clear reason must be given for that proposal. The External Examiner's report and the proposed action plan will be shared with STEP and considered at the subsequent Assessment Board.

## **9. Assessment for professional postgraduate taught programmes**

- a. Where the assessment process consists of an oral assessment, this will be conducted by appropriately qualified and experienced assessors appointed by STEP and CLT International.
- b. The grading system is not layered and is based only on a 'pass', 'fail', 'merit' and 'distinction' basis.

- c. In addition to the core duties outlined in Section 10 the External Examiner will:
- observe a sample of interviews by each individual assessor
  - review the Reflective Journal submitted by candidates
  - provide recommendations to the assessors on the competency of the candidates
  - produce a formal report for consideration by the Assessment Board.

## 10. The duties of External Examiners

- a. The duties of External Examiners are to report on:
- the extent to which the assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for candidates and have been fairly conducted in line with STEP/CLT International regulations, policies and procedures
  - whether the assessment instruments (examination papers and assignments) enable candidates to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the programme
  - whether standards of awards and candidate performance are comparable with those of previous cohorts
  - whether standards of candidate performance are in line with those required by the awarding body (STEP)
  - the comparability of standards and candidate achievement across different centres and jurisdictions.
- b. An External Examiner is required to:
- be in a position to make informed, independent and impartial judgments on the academic standards set, the measurement of candidate achievement, and the rigour and fairness of the assessment process
  - be prepared to advise on any proposed changes to assessment policies and procedures that will directly affect candidates currently registered on the course
  - scrutinise and approve all summative assessment instruments including specimen examination papers and assignments, and unseen examination papers and assignments.
  - evaluate those candidates achieving a mark in the highest and fail grade bands along with a representative sample from each grade boundary sufficient to endorse that the assessment process has been carried out in accordance with the published policies and procedures, and that the standards applied are appropriate to the award. External Examiners shall be consulted on the method for sampling candidates' work for external scrutiny, defining the range for borderline marks and determining what is a representative sample covering the full range of marking bands. Any comments made by the Examiner and an overall mark

- sheet showing the marks for the whole cohort will be provided to the External Examiner. External examiners shall have access to all candidate work submitted for assessment counting towards an award.
  - immediately report to the Chair of the Assessment Board any candidate that they consider to have engaged in academic malpractice
  - be a full member of, and attend the final meeting of, the relevant Assessment Board
  - submit a written report following each sitting (see section 8).
- c. External Examiners are required to preserve absolutely the secrecy of examination papers or assignments at all stages until the papers have been sat by candidates. In the course of their duties, External Examiners will receive information that can be considered the personal data of students. External Examiners are expected to keep such information (including, for example, scripts, marks and comments from examiners) confidential and secure at all times.

## 11. Review of assessed work

- a. External Examiners will not be involved in marking and should not change individual marks. The External Examiner's role is to benchmark overall marking standards. Any suggested changes must be reported to the Assessment Board.
- b. Where review by an External Examiner indicates concern over the marking, the External Examiner can request a review of the marks for the whole cohort.
- c. Where review of assessed work or an analysis of the distribution of the marks indicates the need to review the marks for the whole cohort, the Chair of the Assessment Board has discretion as to whether to:
- arrange for the re-mark of the work of the cohort, or
  - scale the marks for all candidates in relation to agreed benchmarks.

Any recommendations for scaling must be approved by the Assessment Board.

- d. The External Examiner can recommend raising or lowering marks by a set number or percentage for the whole cohort (or a subset, e.g. work marked by a particular marker on a programme assessed by several markers). They may also recommend global changes to marks within particular ten per cent bands, but only if substantial remarking has been undertaken.

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